

A. 0073

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON



SYSTEMATICS OF THE WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW

By W. E. CLYDE TODD

Until a study made some years ago (Taverner and Sutton, *Annals Carnegie Museum*, 23, 1934, 77) disclosed that the prevailing form of the White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) at Churchill was *gambelii* and not *leucophrys* (as these forms are currently understood), there had never been any serious question as to the application of these names. But now there arose an even chance that birds of the *gambelii* type might range farther south along the west coast of Hudson Bay, in which case the specific name might be involved. It so happens that the *Emberiza leucophrys* of Forster (*Philosophical Transactions*, 62, 1772, 403, 426) was described from two specimens, taken respectively at Severn River and Albany Fort, Hudson Bay. In the latest edition of the A.O.U. Check-List the type-locality is definitely restricted to the first-named of these. If this designation is accepted, a regrettable shift in names becomes necessary. Through the courtesy of the authorities of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology of Toronto, Ontario, I have lately been permitted to examine an enlightening series of thirteen White-crowned Sparrows from Fort Severn, collected by Mr. C. E. Hope a few years ago. All but two (or perhaps three) specimens are definitely of the *gambelii* type, with the white superciliaries continued to the bill, and even the exceptions are more or less intermediate.

This being the case, the only possible way to conserve Forster's name for the Eastern White-crowned Sparrow might be to change the type-locality to Albany. However, we do not yet know which form occurs there. Forster's statement (at second hand) that the bird breeds at this place requires confirmation. The White-crowned Sparrow must pass through Albany in migration, but it is unlikely, in my opinion, that it would breed there when it does not breed at the same latitude on the east coast of James Bay. It may be that Forster's informants confused this species with the White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*, when it came to breeding birds. So far as I am aware Forster's type-specimens have dropped out of sight, and his Latin description does not point unmistakably, or with absolute certainty, to which form of the White-crowned Sparrow he had in hand. I translate the pertinent

clauses thus: "then black bowed (lines), from the angle of the eyes, almost coming together on the nape." Obviously, this refers to the postocular black stripe, since he has already noted the lateral coronal black stripes. Had he been describing the eastern race he would have said (presumably) "arcus dein atri per oculos," etc. The very fact that he writes "ex angulis oculorum" instead indicates to my mind that the black stripe he was describing began behind the eye and not at the bill. If, therefore, we rule out a change in the type-locality we are justified, so I believe, in proceeding on the basis of the evidence we have as to the form prevailing at Fort Severn. Unfortunate nomenclatural complications thereupon ensue.

Zonotrichia leucophrys leucophrys (Forster) will have to be transferred to Gambel's Sparrow, and *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii* (Nuttall) becomes a synonym of the other. For the Eastern White-crowned Sparrow another name must be found. Ridgway (Bulletin U. S. National Museum No. 50, Part 1, 1901, 339) cites the *Spizella maxima* of Bonaparte, Compt. Rend., 37, 1853, 922, note, from Mexico, as a doubtful synonym in this connection. Mr. A. J. van Rossem had occasion a few years ago to examine the type-specimen of this name. He writes as follows: "The type of Bonaparte's *Spizella maxima*, which is 7329e in the Brussels Museum, is a first winter example of *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*, or as I have always maintained *Zonotrichia gambelii gambelii*. Fortunately, no name changing is involved in this case. So far as I can determine the writing on the label is that of Bonaparte himself. There is no indication of where the bird was obtained other than 'Mexique,' nor from whom the Brussels Museum purchased it." Under the circumstances I feel that the Eastern White-crowned Sparrow is worthy of a new name and a definite type. I would propose

Zonotrichia leucophrys nigrilora, subsp. nov.

Type.—No. 102,527, Collection Carnegie Museum, adult male; Point Natashquan, Quebec, June 1, 1928; George M. Sutton.

Subspecific characters.—Similar to *Zonotrichia leucophrys leucophrys* (Forster) of the region between Hudson Bay and the Pacific coast, but whitish superciliary stripe ending just above the anterior end of the eyelid, thus leaving the upper part of the lores black, continuous with the lateral coronal stripe; bill (in life) more deeply colored.

While I am provisionally describing this form as a subspecies, I am by no means convinced that it is conspecific with Gambel's Sparrow; there is indeed considerable evidence to the contrary. However, it is certainly thus related to *Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha* Oberholser of the Warner Mountains, Oregon, with which form it has been directly compared. If it is actually specifically separable from the white-browed form it would have to stand as *Zonotrichia oriantha nigrilora*.

The present case is a shining example of the stability of English names as against technical names in our present system of nomenclature.